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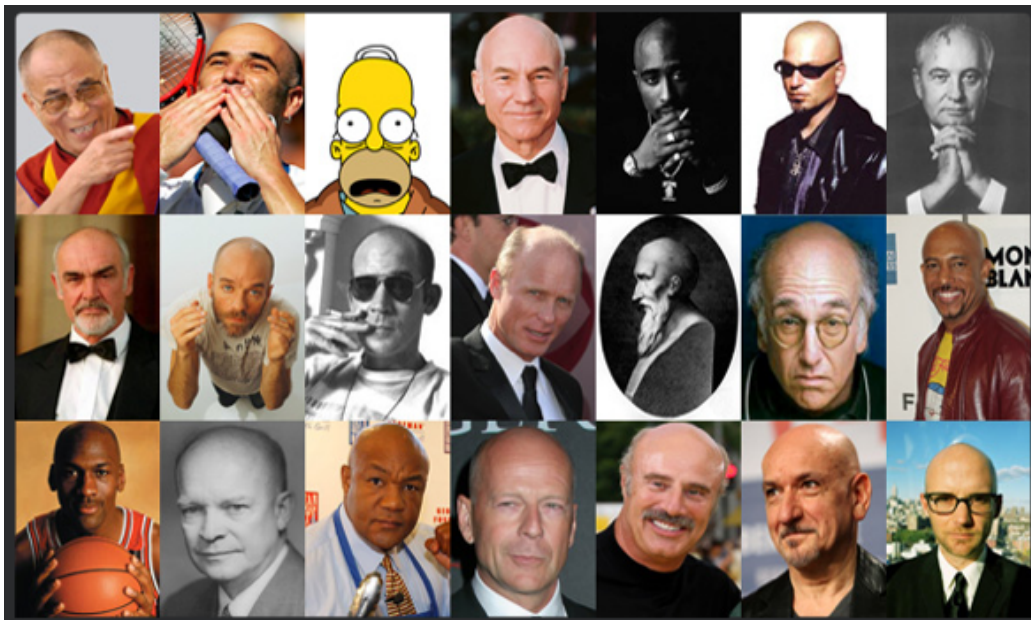
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# The Cure for Baldness Is Almost Here

February 16, 2011 By [Jonathan Lesser](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

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***Unfortunately, it's coming too late to benefit Jonathan Lesser, who is one of what might be the last generation of bald men.***

One generation. That's how close I came. If I had been born just 30 or so years later, I wouldn't have had to suffer years of anxiety from going bald in my 20s, when every day I looked in the mirror and felt shame, when every interaction with an attractive female was torture by dome-related self-consciousness.

Damn you, science.

But my son, my baby boy, he thanks you. If he notices his hair thinning at 22 like I did, he's going to have the ways and means to stop it.

"I'd guess that in 20 years there will be a drug that will be not more expensive than Viagra," says Dr. Luis Garza, assistant professor at Johns Hopkins Medical School Department of Dermatology. Dr. Garza is the lead author of a [study](#) on hair-follicle stem cells, published in January in the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*. The study, which included researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, discovered that there are two types of hair cells—mother and daughter—and that bald men have the mother cells but the daughters are depleted. "The most exciting suggestion of this is that male pattern baldness should be reversible," he says.

When I asked Dr. Garza if he could envision a future with no 30-something bald guys anywhere, he replied, "Yeah, definitely."

Excuse me while I bang my shiny head against this wall.



Already, of course, male pattern baldness can be reduced, halted, and even reversed for some people. There are two FDA-approved treatments: the rub-in solution minoxidil ([Rogaine](#)) and finasteride ([Propecia](#)), which is taken in pill form.

Dr. David H. Kingsley, a hair-loss specialist who sees patients from all over the world in his New York City offices, recommends using both, along with topical scalp stimulants and the \$500 [HairMax LaserComb](#), which uses laser energy to stimulate weak hair follicles. "Minoxidil works with maybe two-thirds of people, Propecia works probably a little bit better," he says. "A multi-treatment approach increases your odds of getting better results."

Even so, this is a regimen that must be followed every day for the rest of your life—stop taking the meds and your hair will thin. An expensive surgical hair transplant remains, for now, the only permanent solution, and even that, Dr. Kingsley says, may need to be repeated every five years or so.

Now about that headbanging. It's just not fair what I had to deal with. When I began to notice my hair thinning—senior year of college, sometime in 1993—I didn't consider using Rogaine, which at the time was discussed on late-night TV by the guy who boasted that he was not only the Hair Club president but also a client. I'm not really a club joiner, and even if I was, c'mon—if you wanted to have more confidence around the ladies, is this the guy you'd enlist to help?

It took a couple of years for me to get used to the idea that I was going to forever look like the Dalai Lama, Bruce Willis, and my uncle Saul, who used to pretend to pull a nickel out of my ear whenever I saw him. During the thinning years, I wore my hair long, in a ponytail, combing the tuft of hair I still had in the bangs area straight back over the top. If I did it just right, I thought, maybe people—especially those shorter than me, i.e., most women—couldn't tell. Eventually—May 1998 to be exact—I said the hell with it and buzzed the whole thing to a quarter inch to survey the damage.

Male pattern baldness. (It's not actually the clinical term—that would be “androgenic alopecia.”) Aside from that little tuft of growth up front and center in the bangs area, the top of my head was barren. Or almost barren. It looked like a lawn after an inch of snow has fallen, covering almost, but not quite, every blade of grass.

Today there is even less grass, and I keep it trimmed even tighter, in order to look more Agassi than Costanza. Plus I wear a beard—I think a certain head-to-hair ratio is necessary—about the same length.



Dr. Kingsley is the author of [The Hair Loss Cure: A Self-Help Guide](#), which includes a section on the psychological effects of hair loss on young men. “It’s not life-threatening, but it is life-altering,” he says (and I agree). “But if you’re proactive, doing everything you can do, you’ll feel better about it. And start as early as possible.”

That’s great advice. I wish Dr. Kingsley’s book had been written two decades earlier, and that I had read it. In fact, I may even prefer that fantasy to the one of being born 30 years later. Because today I don’t mind being bald. It gives me some personality and some maturity that may even work to my advantage at, say, the office. The fact is that I’m not embarrassed to look the way I do at age 39. I look like a guy who could be a competent husband and dad, which is exactly and foremost what I want to be.

I embraced my identity as a bald guy some years ago, but now I’m nursing a new fear: thanks to stem-cell technology, I and other men my age will be the last ones in the history of mankind (OK, in wealthy nations at least) to do so. And equally important to the advances in science is that the stigma of getting treatment for hair loss is disappearing. I have two friends who use Propecia or Rogaine (though I’m sure I have more), but to any college-age guy today, vain or not, after years of exposure to legitimate television, print, and digital advertising, he’s calling his doctor at the first sign of thinning like I take an Advil at the first twinge

of a headache.



So, what's the world going to look like from above in 20 years? Well, I'll be a 60-year-old bald man reflecting the sun at the birds, but you heard what Dr. Garza from Johns Hopkins said: It's quite probable there won't be any young bald guys around to take my place, to carry the torch of Shakespeare, Churchill, Eisenhower, Hunter Thompson, Michael Jordan, Dr. Phil, and the rest of us. No sir, I'm the last of a breed, the last bald man.

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### About Jonathan Lesser

Jonathan Lesser is a freelance writer living in Pelham, New York. His stories have appeared in *Men's Health*, *Men's Journal*, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, *Travel & Leisure Golf*, *Vibe*, *Redbook*, *The New York Times*, and elsewhere.

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